

Tackling urban disparities through participatory culture-led urban regeneration.

Insights from Lisbon

In the last few decades, the diffusion of culture-led urban regeneration schemes has intercepted the growth of participatory approaches across a wide range of policy domains. Partnerships between private and public agencies have sought, accordingly, the engagement of citizens and stakeholders to push forward context-specific interventions. From the participatory action research developed in Lisbon, one of the cities funded under the EU-funded project ROCK, we analyse the ways in which this project has tackled spatial divides and socioeconomic inequalities in the project demonstration area. Our main argument is that operational decisions and substantive mismatches have given rise to opportunities and bottlenecks throughout the implementation of the project. While the public investment has been directed to regenerate a deprived area, it has fallen short of promoting greater connections within the area and with the surrounding neighbourhoods. ROCK's actions have only partially met local community expectations regarding the project's objectives for the optimisation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, with impacts over degrees of citizen engagement in the local Living Lab.

Key words: cultural heritage; urban regeneration; community engagement; Lisbon

1. Introduction

The growth of the world population living in urban contexts has gained unprecedented momentum, and is considered as one of the twenty-first century's most impactful changes (UN-DESA 2019). Demographic growth is paired with the accelerated restructuring of the global financial system, with capital flows determining the (re)distribution of wealth at multiple levels and the increase of disparities (UN-Habitat 2016; OECD Data 2019). European cities confirm global trends with more than two thirds of the population living in urban agglomerations and the aggravation of social inequalities (EU 2017). Unemployment rates, which remain the highest recorded in the Euro area at the outset of the financial crisis in July 2008, fuel the growth of poverty in all member states (Eurostat 2019).

Scholars consider that exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities are often associated phenomena of social exclusion, (racial) segregation, and displacement of the most disadvantaged groups, along with the decline of housing conditions, inadequate access to public transport, degradation of heritage, poor air quality and waste management, and insufficient green space (Wacquant 2008; Soja 2009; UN-Habitat 2011). The recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified inequalities among countries and the uneven distribution of wealth between and within cities, with significant business interruptions and shutdowns all around the world¹. Loss of employment, precarious housing, and public mobility system are some of the issues compelling new governmental decisions in urban contexts (cf. Martin et al. 2020).

The opportunity to tackle disparities among different areas and neighbourhoods has increased significantly at the international level (EU 2017). The dramatic combination of

¹ See, for example: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/coronavirus-inequality.html>

socioeconomic divides and spatial inequalities in contemporary cities has convinced decision-makers to put in place innovative schemes aimed at enhancing the quality of life of poor or at-risk-of-poverty people and improving the decaying built environment (Roberts 2000). To this end, a growing number of urban regeneration schemes has built on participatory approaches to bring together public and private agencies along with local stakeholders and residents towards a consensual (re)definition of goals (Ansell & Gash 2008).

The expansion of urban regeneration schemes is a case in point in Europe. Along with specific programmes and funding for the implementation of regenerative actions, the EU framework programme Horizon 2020 has provided new impetus to the coming together of universities and other agencies in the field. Our article focuses on the EU-funded project “ROCK - Regeneration and Optimisation of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities”, which started in 2017 to promote cultural heritage-led regenerative solutions in ten European cities. The authors of this article are members of the research team at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, one of the project partners. The development of a participatory action research approach in the ROCK demonstration area in the parishes of Beato and Marvila, has allowed us to examine in-depth relevant issues for the international debate about participatory culture-led regeneration.

We focused our attention on the ways in which urban disparities have been tackled in the Lisbon demonstration area, which was selected by the city council for meeting the project’s requirements about geographical proximity to the historical city centre, and decaying and/or underestimated cultural heritage. Our research has provided in-depth knowledge on socio-spatial disparities within the area, and with the surrounding neighbourhoods.

With this in mind, we first take stock of the main trends in participatory culture-led urban regeneration schemes, with a focus on Europe. We focus on the international circulation of ideas and tools in this policy domain and reflect upon context-specific initiatives on the local scale. Secondly, we describe the main features of the ROCK project and zoom in on the Lisbon demonstration area. While it is not our purpose to provide an impact assessment of the project in this article, our research focuses on the ways in which the regeneration scheme has captured urban disparities. Thirdly, we present the multi-method approach adopted for the participatory action research – participatory observation, individual interviews, and surveys – and describe key findings. Lastly, we discuss empirical insights in light of the article’s theoretical framework.

2. Culture-led urban regeneration

After the Second World War, EU regulation for urban regeneration has built on national and local policies that have sought to rescue the urban built environment and improve quality of living (Furbey 1999). In western cities, new forms of neighbourhood revitalisation in the 1960s evolved towards renewal interventions in the 1970s and then to the diffusion of a redevelopment paradigm in the 1980s. The concept of regeneration was centre stage during the 1990s, based on the search for more integrated policies with the involvement of local communities (Roberts 2000).

In Europe, the creation of new programmes and funding opportunities for urban regeneration has built upon the reconfiguration of institutional arrangements from the national scale upwards to supranational agencies, and downwards to regional and local powers. The URBAN community initiative launched in 1994, for example, funded several programmes in this domain, with the URBACT proving to be one of the most well-known for sharing knowledge and know-how on practices of regeneration (EU 2003). More recently, new EU programmes have been launched in support of urban regeneration with

the aim of strengthening the role of cities within the European cohesion policy (Barca 2009).

Within these urban regeneration programmes and funding schemes, participatory approaches are believed to be responsible for maximising positive impacts against social exclusion and isolation, and reduce poverty in deprived urban areas (Harding 1997). Provided with adequate public expenditure, the participation of citizens is, thus, expected to enhance socioeconomic conditions of residents and foster new (job) opportunities for poor and at-risk-of-poverty people (Healey 1997; Edwards 2001). In this vein, the recent Urban Agenda for European Cities has reinforced the call for greater participation in the design and development of regeneration schemes in order to foster greater improvement of life conditions and physical upgrade (EU 2016).

In the last few decades, increasing importance has been placed on cultural policies in cities as a key asset for urban regeneration (Vickery, 2007). From the 1990s onwards, culture has emerged as a bulwark in historic cities that aim to (re)position and brand themselves in a global and competitive market (Peterson 2005). The launch of the “European Capitals of Culture” framework and the “Creative Europe” programmes shows that the EU is highly sensitive to this policy domain and is an active promoter of a stronger nexus between culture and urban policies. The rise of culture-related activities has aimed at generating new economic opportunities that have often contributed to the extensive growth of the tourism industry in some European cities (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993).

The need for cities to stand out in global markets has accelerated the circulation of new ideas and tools of culture-led regeneration in the last few decades (Anttiroiko, 2014). This trend should be understood within a de-bordering global context, where international programmes and funding have a major impact on context-specific public actions (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Parés et al. 2014). As Peck and Theodore (2015) put it “[c]ontemporary

121 policymaking processes have promiscuously spilled over jurisdictional boundaries, both
122 “horizontally” (between national and local political entities) and “vertically” (between
123 hierarchically scaled institutions and domains)” (ibidem: 3). Within such global context,
124 the recovery and promotion of cultural heritage has increasingly triggered local agendas
125 of regeneration (Landry et al. 1996).

126 The concept of cultural heritage encompasses issues of identity and distinctiveness that
127 can create favourable conditions for attracting a new ‘creative class’ when used in local
128 governance (Florida, 2005). As Smith (2006) puts it, “heritage is about negotiation –
129 about using the past, and collective or individual memories, to negotiate new ways of
130 being and expressing identity.” (ibidem: 4). Accordingly, at the root of cultural heritage-
131 led regeneration, international agencies and local authorities see the opportunity to add
132 visibility and value to historical buildings and local traditions in order to strengthen their
133 international attractiveness (Garcia 2004).

134 Yet, as cultural heritage-led regeneration schemes increasingly straddle public, private
135 and community sectors for the spatial and socioeconomic upgrade of deprived urban
136 areas, so too are new opportunities being coupled with emerging challenges (Vickery
137 2007). Participatory approaches are, therefore, seen to play a critical role in the
138 consolidation of urban assets within a global and competitive market where the cities are
139 encouraged to keep high standards of municipal wealth while ensuring the capacity to
140 address issues of socioeconomic inequalities and spatial divides (EU 2003; Prince 2012;
141 Peck 2012).

142 In this regard, some scholars have warned about the risks of rhetorical promises and
143 instrumental purposes brought about by economically-driven and consumeristic
144 conceptions of culture and cultural heritage (Miles & Paddison, 2005). Additional
145 criticism has been directed towards the detrimental use of culture as convenient fiction to

cover policy decisions that would likely be unpopular (Prince, 2012). The conversion of central neighbourhoods into creative districts, and the emphasis placed on the “creative capital” of historical cities often entails the conversion of public spaces into areas of mere consumption (Vicario & Monje, 2003), frequently coupled with a preference for cultural expressions that are rather generic and easily marketable (Sharp, Pollock & Paddison, 2005). The distortion of the location’s authentic character can overwhelm socio-spatial enclosures with big investment opportunities that lead to the displacement of lower-class businesses and residents in favour of an upwardly mobile professional class (Evans 2003; Wacquant, 2011; Peck, 2012).

2.1. Community engagement in culture-led urban regeneration

Participatory approaches in cultural heritage-led regeneration may vary according to a wide number of factors. However, a major difference is made between the nature and scope of schemes developed in centrally located and peripheral areas (Parés et al. 2014). The former tend to pursue goals of economic recovery along with the rebranding of the local ‘authenticity’ through the promotion of new initiatives, services or infrastructures (Dinardi 2015; Peterson 2015). The development of flagship facilities seeks to bring a new social and economic vitality to ‘decaying’ central areas (see, for example, the famous case of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao: Vicario & Monje, 2003). Likewise, the diffusion of street art (see, for example, landmark sculptures and public art schemes: Sharp, Pollock & Paddison, 2005) and international cultural events and festivals have become a key component of competitive urban agendas (Garcia, 2004). On occasion, cities may want to invest in longer-term interventions and create new “cultural districts”, generally moved by an idea of regeneration shaping the creative new identity of places (Peck, 2012).

170 In contrast, the participation of local residents and stakeholders in peripheral
171 neighbourhoods tends to focus on social issues of marginalisation and stigmatisation of
172 disadvantaged communities (Couch et al. 2003; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012). The
173 upgrade of living conditions aims to fight area-specific barriers and advance behavioural
174 changes to reduce the trade-offs of similar environmental factors and institutional
175 shortcomings (Manski 1993). Communities are envisaged as the key players in the
176 reinvigoration of democratic values and arguably it is their active participation that is said
177 to foster greater trust in institutions (Aitken 2012), and policy effectiveness (Taylor,
178 2007).

179 In this field of study, the concept of ‘social capital’ has been extensively recalled by both
180 scholars and practitioners (Putnam 2000). People-based schemes aim to create a positive
181 sense of local communities for the enhancement of quality of life, and the reduction of
182 social inequalities in deprived areas (Bailey and Pill 2011). In some cases, however,
183 participatory approaches rely on the implicit assumption of a linear correlation between
184 participation and people’s experience of place, regardless of the inequalities among
185 community members (Power 2000). Organic ideals of local communities are based on
186 false conceptions of homogeneity and unity, which eventually prevent the understanding
187 of the roots of social capital at best (Furbey 1999; Davies 2002; Jones 2002; Wallace
188 2010), and reproduce the marginalisation of the most vulnerable at worst (Taylor 2007).
189 The support of disadvantaged groups can be misused to decrease the role of public
190 authorities in favour of greater competition amongst private stakeholders (Ferilli et al.,
191 2016). In addition, as Forrest and Kearns (2001) point out, while the strengthening of
192 social capital emphasises the positive sharing of common values, neighbourhoods can
193 develop cohesive strategies and conflict with one another, which ends up further
194 fragmenting the city.

The heterogeneous nature of people and places necessarily requires an attentive analysis of whether and how participatory approaches applied to regeneration schemes can effectively tackle urban disparities. While in central neighbourhoods, cultural heritage is mostly seen as a driver for greater international competitiveness and for improving the cultural offer of the city, on the periphery it can be a powerful engine to reinforce community links and improve the social capital. The action research conducted in the ROCK demonstration area of Lisbon explored these issues and helped problematise empirical insights as discussed below.

3. The ROCK project

The EU-funded ROCK project is composed of thirty-two partners, including universities, city networks, municipalities, small and medium enterprises, and non-governmental organisations. Drawing from main EU directives, the project capitalised on the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, which acknowledged cultural heritage as a strategic asset for the regeneration of historic cities. According to this European ‘manifesto’, the optimisation of cultural heritage should encourage local governments to engage in new ways with both the built environment (e.g. buildings, monuments, and archaeological sites) and intangible sets of local practices, knowledge, performing arts, and skills.

The authors of this article are researchers at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, one of the academic partners of the ROCK project. Lisbon was one of the three ‘replicator cities’ in the ROCK project together with Bologna (which was also the leader of the consortium), and Skopje. The three replicator cities were encouraged to experiment with cultural heritage-led regenerative initiatives based on international good practices showcased by seven European ‘role model cities’, selected under the ROCK project.

Each replicator city identified and promoted cultural heritage-led regeneration in specific demonstration areas close to the cities' historic centres. Understanding cultural heritage as a powerful catalyst for engaging multiple agencies and actors, regenerative initiatives should take place with the collaboration of academic partners, and the wider participation of local residents and stakeholders in local "Living Labs". This popular participatory method was first experimented with in the early 1990s in the United States for collaborative design and piloting of innovative solutions (Nesti, 2018). In the ROCK project, the Living Labs aimed to promote, among multiple actors, knowledge sharing and mutual learning around tangible and intangible cultural heritage towards the implementation of innovative solutions in real-life settings².

3.1.The ROCK project in Lisbon

In Lisbon, the ROCK project was implemented within the context of both longstanding urban trends and more recent transformations. The severe increase in poverty aggravated by spreading economic asymmetries caused by the 2008 financial crisis were coupled with the harsh impacts of an austerity package implemented by the national government between 2011 and 2014. Despite massive budgetary cuts to local authorities (Teles, 2016), Lisbon has experienced a sensible economic recovery in the last few years, driven mainly by tax incentives and liberalisations in real estate, as well as the substantial growth of unregulated short-term rentals for tourists (Mendes 2018; Cocola-Gant et al. 2020). While unemployment rates had recovered slightly, despite continuing to have among the

² The ROCK project included face-to-face and digital tools for participation. Along with a web platform comprising open source data produced by the project, cities were invited to test a multiplatform application for smartphones and tablets based on augmented reality technology; integrated analytics based on people's perception of cultural heritage; sensors for carbon measurement covering waste, water, travel and transportation; a crowd monitoring tool providing insights on activity and mobility patterns; an outdoor multi-parameter tool integrating the most appropriate sensing devices, power and communication systems; an outdoor thermal comfort tool assessing how people rate comfort sensation of thermo-physical properties; an indoor microclimate monitoring tool measuring environment physics variables; sensors and devices in the lighting element to enable access to cultural heritage; people flow analytics generating activity-travel diary data of users.

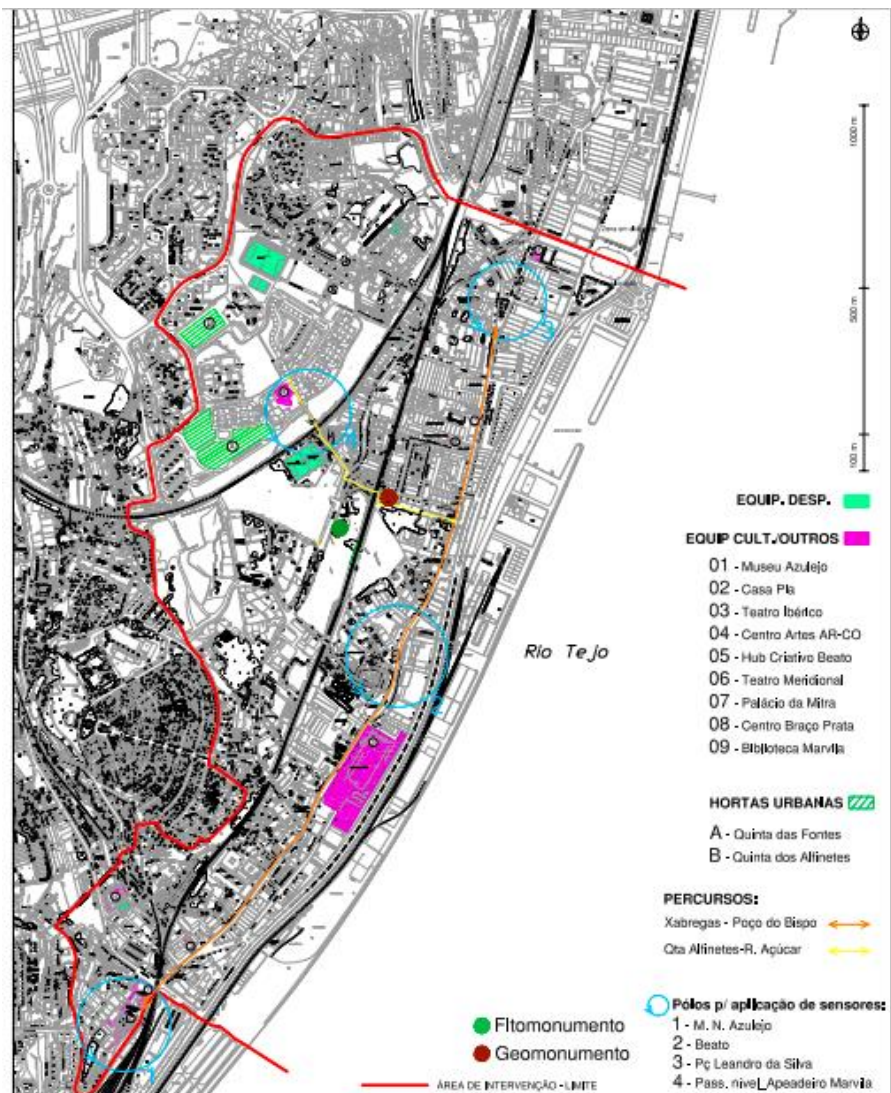
lowest wages in Europe (Observatório sobre Crises e Alternativas 2018) and high rates of income inequality (OECD 2019), the disruptive nature of the Covid-19 pandemic has temporarily arrested this positive trend. The global collapse of national and international mobility, and the impact on the real estate and tourism sectors are likely to radically transform the city (Cocola-Gant et al. 2020).

In the last decade, Lisbon took centre stage in the promotion of an extensive participatory agenda in policymaking, which aimed to counter trends of fiscal retrenchment. The first participatory budget ever launched at the municipal level in a European capital city in 2008 was a case in point at the international level for bringing new impetus to the direct participation of citizens in the allocation of public spending (Falanga and Lüchmann 2020). Likewise, the initiation of the local programme ‘BipZip’ (an acronym for ‘priority areas and neighbourhoods’) in 2011 strengthened the role of the city in the domain of community-based approaches to the urban regeneration of deprived areas. As Falanga (2019) argues, the results of this programme should be understood in light of a multi-scale appraisal of urban and participatory policies, which should allow for the gathering of necessary information about the regeneration of deprived areas in the city.

3.2.The project demonstration area

The geographical proximity to the city centre and the combination of long-lasting and new emerging issues convinced the city council to delimit the project demonstration area across the two civil parishes of Beato and Marvila.

Figure 1 – the ROCK Lisbon demonstration area



Source: Lisbon city council

Long-term urban transformations date back to the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries during which time migratory flows from the countryside to the city were experienced as a result of the prosperous industrialisation in this part of the city (cf. Reis e Silva, 2020). Despite being geographically close to the historical centre, the degradation of the built environment³ in the last few decades has been strongly associated with poor investment

³ The demonstration area in Beato includes around 30% of its buildings and houses, and 20% in Marvila. Buildings located in Beato are older than those in Marvila, due to the decrease in the industrial activity in the 1970s. In Marvila, the increase of construction is associated with the dismantling of old houses and shanty towns from the mid-twentieth century, and the public investment in low rent social housing that peaked in the last few decades to decline at the turn of the century (Barcon, 2017)

in the public built environment and infrastructures, which has prevented the full benefit of this environment from being realised. The weak public transport network and the presence of two train lines (and few pedestrian passages) have fuelled difficulties for the urban mobility within this area, and between this area and the city.

Several decades after the abandonment of the industrial settlements, however, this area has started to attract the interest of public and private agencies. As Lisbon escalates in the world rankings of the most attractive cities in the world, the riverside of this area has become a strategic target for local development. Public plans to (re)connect the historical centre to the affluent commercial and residential neighbourhood of Expo 98 have increased values of post-industrial heritage for new business and real estate investment. In some cases, internationally acclaimed projects in the wake of the bailout-deal, such the real estate operation led by the Renzo Piano atelier close to the reconverted industrial settlement named ‘Fábrica Braço de Prata’, and the more recent launch of the ‘Beato Creative Hub’, boost this transformation.

The riverside emerges, thus, as a periphery within the inner-city, with ambitions of regeneration compounded by the attraction of new investments in post-industrial urban sites. By contrast, the inner side of the demonstration area continues to be severely jeopardised due to underdeveloped public investment in mobility, infrastructures, and services, often paired with social stigmatisation and exclusion. The tangible heritage on this side is mostly composed of abandoned historical palaces and farms within a discontinuous landscape (Barcon 2017). In the last few years, local regenerative initiatives, such as those promoted by the BipZip programme with local NGOs and parish councils have mobilised civil society around the upgrade of buildings and living conditions. In parallel, the self-organisation of local residents has found strong allies in

community groups and stakeholders, which has helped amplify the magnitude of grassroots claims for improved service delivery (Falanga et al., 2020).

Additional elements about the conditions for local transformations have been provided by socioeconomic data on the two parishes of Marvila and Beato⁴. Marvila hosts around 38 thousand residents, with an average age of around 42, and 46 in Beato. Educational rates are extremely low, as Marvila shows the lowest qualification levels in the city, with 60% of the residents only having attended basic school which, along with the number of uneducated individuals, reaches 80% of the resident population in that area. In addition to this, Marvila also has the lowest job occupation rates in the city with more than 3,500 people looking for either their first job or new employment. Lastly, both Marvila and Beato show among the highest unemployment rates, around 16.7%, in the city, and, according to 2015 data, a remarkable increase in the number of homeless people.

Higher concentration of NEET population on the inner side contrasts with the progressive displacement of inhabitants on the riverside by newcomers, short-term renters, visitors and tourists, along with the establishment of new enterprises and businesses in post-industrial buildings and warehouses (Barcon, 2017). This information consolidates empirical insights on the interlocked nature of spatial divides and the phenomena of social isolation, especially with regard to the elderly and people with reduced mobility.

3.3.The cultural-heritage led regenerative initiatives

Acknowledging the urban disparities between the demonstration area and the rest of the city, as well as within that area, the city council decided to concentrate ROCK-funded initiatives on the inner side of the demonstration area. The creation of the Lisbon Living

⁴ The Lisbon Social Atlas collects data from the 2011 national census and other local sources of information. More information at: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=e63936cfadce405b805d7beded9543f0>

Lab was supposed to stimulate the participatory ethos of local stakeholders and communities in order to find innovative solutions for the recovery of decaying built heritage and for preventing local memories and traditions from being consigned to oblivion in the face of a rapidly transforming urban environment. To this end, the city council invited local stakeholders to play an active role in the area and three flagship initiatives of urban regeneration were agreed upon accordingly.

First, the implementation of a pop up store ‘Loja ComVida’ (‘Store with Life/Store Invites’), which aimed to showcase the potential of the reuse of empty stores in social housing buildings in order to activate the social capital and boost new economic activities in the locale. The pop up was led by the local NGO “Rés do Chão”, chosen for its experience with co-design methods in underused spaces in Lisbon. For a period of ten days, a series of cultural and community-based activities were developed inside one store, in the framework of the event ‘Dias de Marvila’ (‘Days of Marvila’) organised by the city council in partnership with the municipal library of Marvila.

Second, the creation of an urban garden named ‘Jardim para Todos’ (‘Garden for All’) through the temporary occupation of an area of publicly owned open land. The garden was planned by the NGO ‘Muita Fruta’ and the architects’ collective ‘Warehouse’. The former has a track record of community-based initiatives in urban farming, while the latter is specialised in participatory approaches for urban interventions. The implementation of this initiative, however, has gone through a complicated process due to the delays of public permissions for the temporary occupation of the land. Only recently, the city council found an alternative place to implement this project, relatively far from the initial land and close to the riverside. While this is still the case, at the time of writing, this initiative has not yet been implemented due to these setbacks and the suspension of all face-to-face activities under the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Third, the creation of an interpretive centre for Marvila and Beato, inside the municipal library of Marvila was led by the local council in partnership with the research team at the Institute for Social Sciences. To this end, a steering board composed of local residents allowed for the collection and recording of a vast number of stories and memories about the place, to be displayed in a new physical and digital repository.

Table 1 – ROCK flagship regenerative initiatives and leading stakeholders

Flagship initiatives	Leading local stakeholders
Pop-up for the reuse of empty stores	NGO “Rés-do-Chão”
“Garden for All” for the occupation of open lands	NGO “Muita Fruta” and “Warehouse” architects’ collective
Interpretive Centre of Marvila and Beato	City council and the Institute for Social Sciences (University of Lisbon)

Besides these three flagship initiatives, a wider set of cultural actions took place in the framework of the ROCK project, such as the ‘Days of Marvila’ and ‘Bibliogamers’ events, both organised in collaboration with the public library of Marvila; the ‘Relâmpago’ (‘Lightning’) project, a one-week workshop with masters students in architecture; and, more recently, the city festival ‘Traça’ (‘Moth/Trace’) based on the participatory sharing of homemade short films of this urban area.

4. Methodology: participatory action research

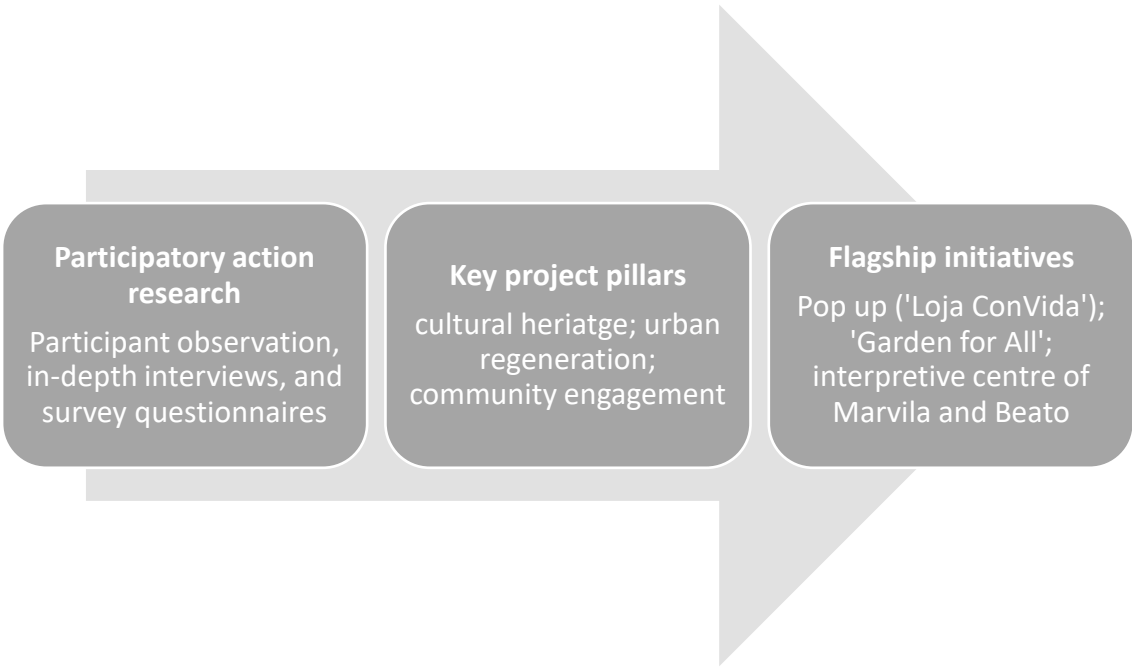
A participatory action research approach was designed and developed in order to produce evidence-based knowledge on the processes and outputs of the ROCK project in the Lisbon demonstration area. As contended by Swantz (2008) this is an approach that “rejects science as the dominating knowledge and bases the problems on everyday

knowledge; the researcher and the researched share their knowledge as equals” (ibidem, 38). Our research goal was, thus, to produce and share situational knowledge with the multiple actors involved in the Lisbon Living Lab so as to openly explore different meanings and expectations of cultural heritage-led regeneration (Kennis and McTaggart 2005). To this end, we developed a self-reflective attitude throughout the project, which allowed us to acknowledge roles and different degrees of power held by actors to ensure an adequate analysis of pluralised sources of knowledge (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001; Mauthner and Doucet 2003).

While aiming to address relevant issues in and for the local communities, we assumed experiential learning as a legitimate form of producing new understandings about urban disparities. Acknowledging the local experience of the project as a basis of knowing, we played an active role in encouraging a broader understanding of regenerative initiatives from multiple standpoints. In particular, we critically examined urban disparities in the demonstration area to improve local consciousness over existing socioeconomic inequalities.

To this end, we engaged with local stakeholders and communities in the field between April 2017 and March 2020. Empirical inquiry was based on the application of a multi-method approach: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and survey questionnaires (see fig.2). In line with the participatory action research methodology, we also provided direct support and advice to the initiatives in the field, as in the case of focus groups with local actors and with institutions regarding the reuse of empty stores (Falanga and Nunes, 2018). An active role was also played by the research team in the design and implementation of the interpretive centre, as members of the organising committee, together with representatives from the city council, and a sample of local community members and stakeholders (Reis e Silva, 2020).

Figure 2 – Participatory action research through three key project pillars on three flagship initiatives



Source: authors' own work

Our research approach was particularly focused on problematising emerging issues in light of three key conceptual pillars of the ROCK project: cultural heritage, urban regeneration, and community engagement. Taking the implementation of the ROCK project in Lisbon as our case study, we aimed to provide a nuanced view of a specific reality that, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), held the potential to trigger new learning processes. To exploit the potential of context-dependent knowledge into generalised lessons to be learnt from Lisbon, this case study was approached as a specific translation of international models of cultural-heritage led regeneration. The entrenched dynamics between the creation of the Lisbon Living Lab and the existing urban disparities relies, therefore, on multiple components at play in the development of a specific set of regenerative initiatives (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008; Peck and Theodore 2015).

Data analysis was based on the qualitative appraisal of field notes from the participant observation; content analysis of the in-depth interviews; and inferential statistical analysis (qui square and F tests) of the survey questionnaires.

First, field notes were drawn up according to our line of inquiry in the field. We aimed to account for multiple sources of knowledge on the implementation of the project through the participant observation in daily contexts. Insights were revised purposefully throughout the fieldwork and were open to the retention of emerging tensions and other significant components among local residents, city council and stakeholders primarily, and international partners to a different extent (Philippi and Lauderdale 2008). Secondly, the analysis of the interviews aimed to ensure valid inferences from the discourses produced by different actors (Krippendorff, 2004). Bearing in mind the exploratory purpose of the in-depth interviews, we decided not to create a proper data coding exercise, and rather examined the personal perceptions of the activities developed through the ROCK project as our main units of analysis. Finally, the statistical analysis of the extensive survey questionnaire was based on descriptive and inferential methods, namely Qui Square and F tests, to provide information about differences in proportions and means (Correia et al., 2020).

4.1.Participant observation

The aim of participant observation was to understand the ways in which cultural heritage played a relevant role for local stakeholders and communities in the co-creation and implementation of regenerative solutions in the demonstration area. To this end, we opened the fieldwork to new understandings about the multiple meanings of cultural heritage and the interconnected nature of socio-spatial disparities through ongoing urban changes (Gupta and Ferguson 1996). This endeavour was based on the iterative interaction with community members, where we brought our own identities as researchers

to the field. As Angrosino and Rosenberg (2013) put it, this operation requires a commitment to self-reflect on our own positionality, which is a significant challenge in research processes that are influenced by global agendas (cf. Mauthner and Doucet 2003). As argued by the authors, we “have to keep reminding ourselves that the “place” we are participating in and observing may no longer be the total social or cultural reality for all the people who are in some way or another affiliated with the community” (ibidem, 163).

Participant observation of the three flagship initiatives has allowed us to develop an in-depth understanding of the activities funded through the project and whether they were tackling urban disparities. Cultural and community-based activities promoted through the pop-up provided empirical insights on the ways in which community members experienced and learned from this initiative. Likewise, the planning process of the project ‘Garden for All’ highlighted some key challenges related to the implementation of participatory approaches in regeneration schemes covering environmental and urban spaces. Finally, the creation of the interpretive centre gave us the opportunity to observe the ways in which intangible cultural heritage is perceived and remembered by different actors and the process of negotiation for the organisation of this new physical and digital repository.

Alongside the three flagship initiatives, we observed a broader range of smaller actions funded by the ROCK project. The ten-day ‘Days of Mavila’ event developed a series of cultural initiatives throughout the demonstration area, with around 2,500 people taking part in the event (Falanga and Nunes 2018). Likewise, the ‘Bibliogamers’ took place in mid-March 2019 in the public library and secondary schools of Marvila. It was an event aimed at capitalising the video game culture in the city, which attracted members of the public from different neighborhoods, and nine teams of game programmers, designers,

and music composers in a two-day hackathon to create videogame prototypes based on the cultural heritage of Marvila (Falanga and Nunes 2019).

4.2.In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with key actors of the ROCK project, including members of the international consortium and local actors. Interviews pursued exploratory goals and were implemented through unstructured scripts to access the level of interviewee understanding of specific research issues related to the three conceptual pillars of the ROCK project (McCracken 1988). As this type of interview elicits a vivid picture of individual perspectives, interviews were unstructured, which aimed to more openly explore information with our interviewees (Zaharia et al. 2008). Interviews were conducted between April and September 2019, when the project was already at an advanced stage of implementation, allowing for a more evidence-based discussion of local culture-led regeneration processes and expected outcomes

For the purposes of this article, we retrieve insights from five interviews with key actors that were responsible for informing, supervising and implementing the ROCK project in Lisbon: one member of the international consortium in charge of guiding and monitoring the local ecosystem of stakeholders; one member of the public company managing the social housing stock in Marvila, who collaborated in different ROCK actions and who is well acquainted with local urban disparities; two members of the NGOs who were invited by the city council to develop flagship initiatives in the demonstration area; and one member of the ROCK coordination team in the local council. Each one of these interviews aimed at collecting information about personal perceptions of the ROCK project, with a focus on the operationalisation of the three conceptual pillars in light of existing urban disparities.

4.3. Survey questionnaires

Finally, the research team conducted three survey questionnaires with both open and closed-ended questions to collect qualitative and quantitative data about the impacts of ROCK actions in the field and about how participants and local residents understood their scope. We applied two short surveys with randomly selected samples of participants to two ROCK events – the ‘Days of Marvila’ and the ‘Bibliogamers’ – and one extensive questionnaire with a representative sample of the population (Falanga and Nunes, 2018; Falanga et al. 2019; Correia et al. 2020). Quantitative and qualitative data aimed to capture the complexity of social practices and experiences of ongoing changes in the neighbourhood and the ways in which the ROCK project contributed to addressing urban disparities (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008). The short surveys were applied by research team members, who learned to be familiar with the demonstration area, while the extensive survey questionnaire was applied with the assistance of a team of ten interviewers, who were trained and supported by the research team throughout the fieldwork between May and August 2019⁵. The extensive survey was conducted with a stratified proportional quota sample of the local population living in the demonstration area (n=368) based on data of the national Census (2011), which corresponds to an acceptable margin of error of 4.5%.

5. Findings

⁵ The topics covered by the survey were: tangible and intangible cultural heritage (personal meanings, accessibility and frequency of use); urban changes (main ongoing transformations in the built environment and social fabric); urban voids (present meanings and potentialities for the future); urban mobility within the demonstration area and connections with the city; local economy (focus on community trade and new entrepreneurial ventures in the demonstration area); future (local and international plans in the demonstration area); citizen participation (community linkages, institutional and grassroots initiatives); assessment of the ROCK project in the demonstration area. All data from the survey questionnaire are available at: <https://opendata.rockproject.eu/dataset/a-inquiry-crossings>

Findings are presented according to their relevance for the three key conceptual pillars: cultural heritage, urban regeneration, and community engagement.

5.1.Cultural heritage

Around 76% of the respondents to the extensive survey questionnaire valued churches and convents (63.6%, with a higher percentage of women), followed by farms and palaces (62%), and associations and cultural spaces (35.9%) as tangible cultural heritage of the demonstration area. The latter, however, were perceived as more accessible due to the state of abandonment that characterises older sites, namely churches, farms, and palaces (cf. Poggemann, 2020). The degradation of post-industrial sites is further perceived as one of the biggest losses, with 39.4% of the respondents, mostly senior, pointing to this as a profound change in the area. Unequal access to cultural heritage is, thus, a key finding which relates to context-specific uneven spatial conditions within the area. Likewise, the reduced supply of public transport reduces the possibility of improving urban mobility, as cultural sites are often hard to reach, which exacerbates the downsides for people with reduced mobility, including the older demographic of the population.

Data further suggests that residents tend to value community aggregation as a valuable component of the intangible heritage of the area. Three elements are pointed out as key drivers in this field: local stories and memories (51.9%), religion (34.8%) and agricultural traditions (21.5%, with higher rates from senior people). The sharing of personal and collective stories and memories is a case in point connected to the preservation of local culture and traditions, a key issue for the ROCK project. In line with the above, where religious rituals and ceremonies are perceived as significant, the project did not directly address this issue, while the perceived importance of agricultural traditions was identified as a driver for the implementation of activities based on urban farming and gardening.

Field notes confirmed survey data, as several informal meetings were organised by local residents and stakeholders in order to report the significant urban disparities in accessing the built environment and impaired urban mobility. Some of these issues convinced the city council to invest in the creation of the interpretive centre in the municipal library of Marvila.

5.2.Urban regeneration

Following the project's line of inquiry and action, urban regeneration in the demonstration area was primarily based on the recovery of urban voids, considered to be a major hurdle for the optimisation of cultural heritage. Residents tend to associate the concept of 'void' with the presence of open lands, empty stores, abandoned buildings, vacant houses, closed warehouses, and ruins of old factories. In some cases, respondents to the extensive survey referred to sites in association with tangible heritage, while in others they more clearly connoted the state of degradation as the result of underdeveloped public action. The results of this survey showed that the presence of empty stores and open lands was more frequently referred to by residents living on the inner side, while in contrast, respondents living on the riverside were more concerned about abandoned post-industrial sites.

These findings are corroborated by a greater perception of increased rental prices around the riverside (45.4%, with higher rates of younger respondents), and the abundance of vacant houses on both the inner and riverside (42.9%). However, while the local population, most likely the poorest element, was forced to move from the riverside due to the increase in house prices, problems on the inner side are essentially related to the setbacks connected with the bureaucratic procedures for the assignment of (social) housing.

Emerging differences between the inner and riverside within the area were corroborated by residents' perceptions of the key public groups targeted by of local business, as shown by the extensive survey. The few grocery stores and bakeries are perceived as community places on the inner side, as opposed to the opening of new cafes, nightclubs, cultural sites and restaurants on the riverside. Empirical knowledge confirmed the acceleration of a growing number of private developers, investors, visitors and tourists on the riverside, which contributed to the increase in living costs, one of the most acute causes of spread displacement. In parallel, the disproportionate absence of public and private services on the inner side, such as health centres, pharmacies, and supermarkets, has increasingly resulted in the local population publicly reclaiming new public investments.

As argued by one member of the local public company managing the social housing stock in Marvila, residents on the inner side feel that basic needs are not being met by public authorities and the blueprint for new economic activities prevents further development of the area. The proposition of the city council to rent some of the empty stores to local NGOs in the cultural sector has not been well received either, as residents "*would have appreciated being heard before this decision was taken*", confirmed our interviewee.

Additional concerns have arisen as to the use of open lands. The plan for the initiative 'Garden for all' was presented to the wider public in 2018 with the intention of collecting ideas about uses and public facilities. However, difficulties experienced in obtaining the authorisation to temporarily occupy the land convinced the city council to find a new location in a publicly owned backyard on the riverside. "*It is a mystery how a project that is coordinated by the municipality needs to struggle to have answers for things that are governed by the municipality itself!*" said a member of one of the two stakeholders. Our interviewee further pointed out the entrenched and, at times, unclear bureaucratic procedures behind temporary land use in Lisbon. As a result, the garden has not yet been

implemented, and the change of location was not properly communicated to the local residents on the inner side.

Some questions arose as to the choice of implementing this initiative on the riverside, where the perception of urban voids, according to our extensive survey, mainly refers to post-industrial sites. On this point, Verheij (2020) further argues that “[t]he type of public involved in the initial proposal near the Marvila Library is potentially different from the public involved in the new location in Poço do Bispo, where many residents and local businesses have settled recently while others were forced to leave their homes” (ibidem, p. 30).

5.3. Community engagement

Lastly, our inquiry allowed for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data about the nature of community engagement in the demonstration area. Survey data shows that local authorities, associations, and other formal groups are perceived as the main actors of social activation, while some degree of dissatisfaction emerges as to the capacity of self-organisation. This negative trend is especially true among older people, and is paired with the feeling that current community linkages are getting worse today, which seems to confirm the perceived important legacy of the strong associative life during the industrialisation of this area. In contrast, respondents aged between 36 and 55 tend to rate community engagement more favourably.

Institutional settings for citizen participation are more rarely acknowledged, as only 15% of the respondents is familiar with the type of initiatives promoted by the local authorities, as in the case of participatory budgeting and the BipZip programme. An even smaller part actually engaged with these initiatives (4.9%). Focusing on ROCK-funded actions, findings from the two short surveys applied in key events – the ‘Days of Marvila and the

585 ‘Bibliogamers’ – point out significant degrees of public participation, with 64% of
586 participants coming from surrounding neighbourhoods in the former, and around 89% of
587 participants born in Marvila, but living in other neighbourhoods in the latter. These data
588 are doubled by high levels of appreciation for the opportunity to get to know this often
589 forgotten area of Lisbon, which relates again to the underdeveloped mobility system, as
590 more than 50% used their private vehicles to take part in these events.

591 Interviews with a member of the local public company managing the social housing stock
592 in Marvila confirmed that urban mobility is a major issue in the area. Accordingly, the
593 ROCK project could be beneficial to “*open the neighbourhood up*” to new visitors, as she
594 said. However, she continued, this type of project also generates expectations as to real
595 improvements in the field, which are barely fulfilled. The significant number of research
596 projects that “landed” in this area out of a real commitment to communities has spread
597 frustration in local communities because, in several cases, these projects “*come and go,*
598 *and you cannot really understand why they came here*”. The short-term frame of the
599 ROCK project is, therefore, a sensible issue for community engagement. “*In this project,*
600 *citizens are beneficiaries, but they do not really own a stake*” argued one member of the
601 international consortium.

602 According to the member of one of the local stakeholders involved in the Living Lab,
603 local residents have not felt entirely comfortable with ROCK initiatives, and often
604 dropped out because the project was not well advertised in the area. The transformative
605 potential of this project, she continued, did not adequately meet residents’ expectations.
606 The member of another NGO involved in the project seemingly addressed these
607 downsides: “*participation is not about showing you something and asking you whether*
608 *you like it or not. This is not participation, because the decision is already made. And*
609 *even if you say that you don’t like it, I can say that the decision was made in a*

participatory way”. The interview with a member of the city council helped clarify that the difficulties for effective participatory approaches arise as a result of the requirements brought about by the multi-level governance of the project. In Lisbon, she argued that the coordination team in the city council was relatively small and that taking care of all required tasks and the relationships with international partners and local stakeholders had proved to be very time-consuming.

Our understanding from the field about the way the Lisbon Living Lab had been put in place confirms some of the information above. On the one hand, local residents and stakeholders felt some bottlenecks when seeking to promote greater community engagement, most probably due to the short-term agenda of the project and the temporary nature of the piloting initiatives. On the other, besides the participatory ethos of the interpretive centre, the city council played a more regulatory rather than engaging role within the demonstration area, which could be partly due to the high complexity of the project governance structure.

6. Discussion

The participatory action research allowed us to retrieve empirical insights on the ways in which the potential for cultural heritage-led regeneration has tackled spatial divides and socioeconomic inequalities in the ROCK demonstration area. Despite being geographically close to the city centre, the demonstration area holds evident mobility impairments and a reduced public transportation network. The research made clear that problems do not only relate to urban mobility between this area and the city, but within the area where heavy infrastructures (two railways dividing this area) prove to be a major impediment to circulation.

Drawbacks, however, have not had the same magnitude within the area, as opposite trends emerge between the inner side and riverside. The former suffering from low degrees of urban development; the latter targeted by developers, investors, and newcomers as a new centre of attraction. This contraposition recalls scholarship contributions about urban regeneration in central and peripheral urban areas. Degraded peripheries are more likely to receive community-based interventions that generally aim at tackling phenomena of social exclusion and poverty (Fainstein 2006; Wacquant 2008; UN-Habitat 2011). To this end, poorly-educated, low-income and/or unemployed people are often invited to play an active role in socially embedded activities (Couch et al. 2003; Taylor 2017; Aitken et al. 2012; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012).

Data from the 2011 Portuguese census and from our extensive survey, in fact, confirmed that this urban area holds one of the highest levels of undereducated and underemployed inhabitants (Correia et al. 2020). As this type of population is concentrated on the inner side of the demonstration area, risks of creating socio-territorial enclaves affected by declining housing conditions, inadequate access to public transport, and degradation of heritage (Soja 2009) are evidently high.

By contrast, the riverside more clearly shows trends of market-oriented regeneration associated with citywide strategies for increased international attractiveness (Florida, 2005; Peck, 2012). The presence of deindustrialised sites has attracted large scale real estate investments, new businesses and the boosting of the creative industry sector, and short-term rental housing for tourism (Vickery, 2007). However, the economic impetus brought about by this sort of regenerative action often engenders significant drawbacks, such as the displacement of poorer residents and widespread depopulation, which is actually taking place on the riverside of the demonstration area (cf. de Sousa, 2018).

Acknowledging the challenging task of tackling these multiple urban disparities, findings show positive and negative consequences of community engagement in this type of cultural-heritage led regeneration, which necessarily accounted for context-specific conditions in this part of the city. A critical consideration should be made about the decision to concentrate ROCK-funded actions on the inner side of the demonstration area. Findings show that not only did local communities expect longer-term public commitments, but that little effort was actually made to ‘open up’ these neighbourhoods and improve its connection with the rest of the city. As scholars have advocated, the enhancement of quality of life should rely upon a mixed strategy looking at inside and outside deprived areas (Putnam 2000; Bailey and Pill 2011). Improving connections within the area and with the city should have better accounted for power differences and overcome implicit ideals of homogenous local communities (Power 2000; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Wallace 2010).

In addition, if one considers what local communities perceive as tangible and intangible cultural heritage, post-industrial built environment and cultural sites were somewhat underestimated in the implementation of the project in Lisbon. Likewise, the regeneration of intangible cultural heritage addressed only some of the local practices and habits identified by residents in our extensive survey. This was the case with cultural activities (e.g. needlecraft, woodwork, biking, etc.) in the pop up, and urban farming in the ‘Garden for All’, but not in the case of religious traditions. This substantive mismatch is probably related to the low degrees of community participation in the co-design of the initiatives, and to greater attention paid to urban voids through the reuse of empty stores and the occupation of open lands. Possible confusion on the project goals was compounded by the limited spatial reach of the project within the city, probably due to pitfalls in its communication strategy. Moreover, from our interviews and our experience in the field

we could confirm a general concern with the short-term timeframe of regenerative pilot initiatives, and the feeling that this type of project is promoted by ‘outsiders’ that come and go (Peck and Theodore 2015).

As Gaventa and Cornwall (2011) put it “[s]imply creating new spaces for participation, or new arenas for diverse knowledge to be shared, does not by itself change social inequities and relations of power, but in some cases may simply make them more visible” (ibidem, 184). Evidence from Lisbon shows that this type of result is strongly dependent on the institutional degree of the participatory spaces that are created.

In relation to this, we noted that the Lisbon Living Lab was limitedly perceived as a space of meaningful participation, which might be related to the wide definition of this concept and, thus, its empirical implications in the field (Nesti 2018). In contrast, the creation of the interpretive centre actively involved local residents and stakeholders by sharing local memories, and discussing concrete possibilities for future cultural projects. Nevertheless, community engagement more frequently happened in informal ways on the edges of the project. In particular, the community group composed of local institutions and residents in the demonstration area held a significant role in enabling local communities to drive local changes through self-organisation. Despite joining together some of the agents involved in the ROCK project (e.g. some local residents and NGOs, as well as members of the Institute of Social Sciences), this project did not formally seek connections with the group nor did the group itself look at the project as a concrete opportunity for the improvement of the locale.

7. Conclusions

In this article, we presented the main findings of participatory action research applied to a cultural heritage-led regeneration scheme under the EU-funded project ROCK. We

focussed on its implementation on the eastern side of Lisbon, in a demonstration area across the parishes of Marvila and Beato. In our research, we collected quantitative and qualitative data through multiple methods of inquiry, which allowed us to examine in-depth the ways in which urban disparities have been tackled by the project. Substantive mismatches and operational decisions throughout the implementation of regenerative actions in the field have helped explain positives and negatives in the demonstration area.

Two main components emerged from our participatory action research. On the one hand, operational decisions made regarding the spatial concentration of community engagement initiatives on the inner side of the demonstration area built on longstanding traditions of associative life and on the more recent participatory ethos induced by other local programmes of urban regeneration in the city. However, not only did the short timeframe of ROCK pilot initiatives add a layer of complexity to achieving effective community engagement, but local community members expected longer-term public commitments against the drawbacks of the area. Moreover, little investment was made to ‘open up’ the neighbourhoods and, thus, to connect the inner and riverside elements of the demonstration area, as well as to better connect this area with the rest of the city.

On the other hand, what seemed to be a shift from a broader conception of cultural heritage to a more focussed look at the reactivation of urban voids, actually resulted in limiting the local community’s perception of the main goals of the project. Substantive mismatches between people’s ideas of tangible and intangible heritage and the initiatives funded by the project generated confusion about the agenda of urban regeneration actions. Mismatches also revealed low participation rates in the co-design of the activities, which most probably helped to decrease community engagement throughout their implementation. As the Living Lab was perceived as an institutional space of participation that provided little room for public debate, the short-term agenda of this type

of EU-funded project further impaired the potential for community engagement towards longer term solutions.

These insights confirm the need to account for the ways in which regeneration schemes tackle urban disparities through participatory approaches. While we acknowledge three main limitations of our research, we also believe that three general lessons may be learned from our experience, which will hopefully inspire future research on this topic.

Limitations concerned theoretical, methodological and empirical conditions of our participatory action research. First, the ROCK project provides a highly interdisciplinary combination of theoretical frameworks that challenge any type of silo understanding about urban regeneration. We distilled three key pillar concepts, but believe that other relevant concepts could have been more deeply investigated, such as the smart specialisation strategies sought through the promotion of digital tools in this project. Second, participatory action research is a time-consuming methodology that requires a solid commitment to fieldwork. We are aware that our approach can be biased by our personal perspectives on some of the emerging issues, and have sought to mitigate associated risks of misunderstanding through systematic self-reflection of our positionality within the ROCK consortium and with local actors in the field. Third and last, the ways in which each ROCK city council has managed the project necessarily influences its achievements. In our case, we acknowledge that the choices made in Lisbon have relied upon the coming together of different agendas of the city council, local communities and stakeholders, as well as ourselves.

As regards the lessons that can be learned, we believe that urban regeneration schemes should build on in-depth examinations of the spatial divides and socioeconomic inequalities to co-design effective solutions with local communities and stakeholders. Our case study has shown that missing this point may have reduced the potential of

regenerative actions. Second, community engagement should draw inspiration and enhance synergies with formal and informal settings of participation and expand the room of debate within the institutional framework. Our research showed that the Living Lab was not perceived as a meaningful space of participation as opposed to other existing participatory settings, with little intention to interact. Third, initiatives funded through short-term funding programmes should be framed within longer-term local strategies, based on the clear commitment of public authorities to tackle urban disparities.

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